



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

OVER \$1 MILLION SEIZED AND 8 ARRESTED IN ICE INTERNATIONAL MONEY LAUNDERING BUST

Millions of U.S. dollars laundered through the Black Market Peso Exchange

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced today that a four-year ICE investigation dubbed “Operation Wave Runner” has resulted in 11 indictments and eight arrests involving a complex drug money-laundering scheme that covered the United States, Europe, the Caribbean, and South and Central America.

The eight individuals arrested are charged with violating Title 18, United States Code (USC), Section 1956 and 982 for their alleged membership in several money laundering and drug trafficking organizations operating out of Puerto Rico. The indictment alleges that the individuals are responsible for laundering millions of U.S. dollars through the Black Market Peso Exchange scheme.

The Black Market Peso Exchange is a decades-old money-laundering infrastructure that is estimated to handle billions worth of illicit dollars annually. It is among the primary means by which Colombian drug cartels convert their U.S.-based drug dollars into “clean” pesos that they can use in Colombia.

The arrests occurred Friday in the municipalities of Vega Alta, Carolina, Gurabo, Bayamon, San Juan, Puerto Rico and New York City, New York. Those arrested are:

- Luis Lopez Birriel, 41, U.S. citizen
- Jean Negron Lopez, 27, U.S. citizen
- Angel M. Sierra Rivera, 31, U.S. citizen
- Elie M. Rivera Adorno, 30, U.S. citizen
- Alex Navarro Jimenez, 31, U.S. citizen
- Rafael Flores Mejia, 54, Dominican national
- Eutacio Caceres Cabrera, 36, Dominican national
- Manuel Alcantara Galvan, 45, Dominican national

To date, ICE has forfeited 14 domestic and international bank accounts and seized at least \$1,323,583 in connection to the case.

"This operation combined the best investigative techniques of ICE and Puerto Rico state and local law enforcement agencies to dismantle these money laundering organizations," said Leo I. Morales, acting ICE special agent-in-charge for Puerto Rico. "Those who seek to use Puerto Rico as an operating ground for their illicit activity need to think twice. We are committed to identifying these money launderers and to ensuring that they are brought to justice."

All of those arrested are in U.S. Marshals custody at the Metropolitan Detention Center awaiting the outcome of their case.

Penalties for the money laundering offense range from a fine of no more than \$500,000.00, or twice the value of the property involved in the transaction, whichever is greater, or imprisonment of 20 years, or both.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial and the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Timothy Henwood is prosecuting the case. The ICE investigation into the case is ongoing.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.